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ABSTRACT

Research and researchers must be willing to break away from traditional approaches when dealing with the real world of the urban community. First, ways must be found that will bring research out of the rarefied atmosphere of the university and reduce the distrust and the misunderstanding it has produced in the urban community. Research should focus on urban problemsolving and information generation for decisionmaking, and action research should be encouraged to refocus present research thrusts. In order to accomplish a wider range of research and increase the number performing research, formal programs (Facilitator of Research in Urban Schools and Communities) at universities should be developed to train individuals who would (1) be trained to do relevant research at the local level; (2) be urban problemsolving and information oriented; (3) train local school or community personnel in the planning and execution of research projects; (4) be a consultant to local urban personnel involved in projects; (5) be a researcher sensitive to the needs of the urban school and community; and (6) manage research projects in the urban community. (Author)

# A CALL FOR ACTION RESEARCH IN THE URBAN COMMUNITY, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW RESEARCH TRAINING PROGRAM TO FACILITATE SUCH RESEARCH[1]

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## Rationale for Research in the Urban Community

The term "Research conjurs up images embedded in sterotypes that in many cases have been developed (or projected) by the research community itself.[2] In education, this sterotype is either one modeled after the clinical psychologist (e.g., rat running, S-R bonding alias E. L. Thorndike or B. F. Skinner, freshmen psychology class studies, etc.) or the survey research type (e.g., attitudes of teachers towards open-classrooms; School Board members' training in Southwest Arizona, etc.) done in "partial fulfillment of requirements for a Doctor of Education degree." Although such research might influence education, there are many pressing education needs in urban communities that must be investigated with a goal of influencing educational policies in a particular community. The focus on a particular community's needs can be justified on the basis that: (1) the nice neat factors and conditions (e.g., randomization, controls, etc.) are not usually found in the actual urban educational setting; (2) each community has commonalities and uniqueness that makes inferences to a particular setting from probablity studies extremely dubious;

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[1] Paper presented at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

[2] "Actually, research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data" (Mouly, 1970:12). This description of the nature of research will be the operational definition of research used in this paper.

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(3) large national studies, such as the Equality of Educational Opportunity (Coleman, 1966), the Youth in Transition Project (Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, the University of Michigan started in 1965), and Project TALENT (American Institutes for Research, started in 1960) have had minimal, if not non-existent influence on educational policies and practices in particular urban communities - this very fact is illustrated in Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America by Jencks, et al. (1972). Although one might question Jencks' conclusions, the inequalities discussed in his text are illustrative of the fact that educational policies are like the Rock of Gilbraltar - immovable; and finally (4) on a more personal and crucial level, many parents in urban communities resent research on their children and in "their" schools that produce no tangible results (changes in: schools, curriculum, or educational policies) or smack of experimentation for experimentation sake (no matter how justifiable it appears to the researcher).

Hopefully research that focuses on local units (urban community, school districts, neighborhoods, school building units, etc.) with specific problems should have more immediate pay off in terms of changes and decision making. Certainly information gathered in systematic, discipline, and unbiased inquiry would supply information about an environment or a situation that could be used as vital input in decision making. The need to focus on an environment or a particular situation is best described by Amitai Etzioni's rather prophetic statement:

> What is becoming increasingly apparent is that to solve social problems by changing people is more expensive and usually less productive than approaches that accept people as they are and seek to mend not them but the circumstances around them (1972).

It is the circumstances, and the elements within the circumstances, that need to be investigated. A better understanding of the elements and the circumstances could be used as input in policy decision making. It is rare that the traditional research which follow the classical research models can supply such information as a result of the rather restricted parameters within which the researcher himself must work. Classical research does have a role to play in urban communities. It can possibly be used as a theory base from which or to which the researcher can move to solve problems, answer questions, or look at the dynamics of a given environment (circumstance in Etzioni's terms).

However, researchers and research must become more humanistic in their focus. This becomes crucial in a period of accelerated change, such that we are presently facing. Martin (1972) in discussing institutional college research makes cogent points for all researchers and research. He calls for: renewed concern for humanistic ethics in research - attention to norms as well as "intuitive, subjective, inward dimensions of human life and social realtionships," a balance of rational with the irrational, showing the limitations and potential of both; including in the humanistic research ethic "wish to want, vision to immediacy, aspirations to reality, perfection to coping;" research going beyond the obvious; and a recognition that significance will be in direct proportion to the importance of the educational issues raised and the extent to which

assessments of responses are future-oriented. In urban communities, as in all communities, the basic and primary unit is the individual, once the researcher looses this perspective and becomes more amoured by "bouncing Beta's and flipped matricies" then the humanism and consequently the dynamics and force becomes subservient to the structure and/or design. An analogy might very well be the perverbial dog and tail; the dog is the purpose of the research, the tail the design and statistical approach. When the humanistic factors are lost, the tail wags the dog.

The justification for research, in particular action research, as conceived by this writer, is to reduce uncertainty and consquently to supply information. Hopefully the utility of research will be achieved by an expanding consumer clientele as indicated by Ely (1973). Data does not become information until used to achieve a specific purpose. This purpose hopefully would be used in decision making. The data may supply only a small particle in the mosaic of an informational pattern or it may be a large part, or even the entire pattern. Nonetheless, its utility can only be assessed by its use. This is not unique to research, nor is this a new concept. For writers and artists have from time immemorial been transcribing their thoughts and ideas for others to use - in essence to be used as information. Ely (1973:15-17) discussed five misconceptions concerning information needs. The misconceptions are: 1. Information needs can be easily identified; 2. Information is best handled in institutional settings (e.g., schools, libraries); 3. All information is of potentially equal value; 4. Given sufficient information, decisions can be made; and 5. Information and education are unrelated (as traditional information moves from a source-controlled

system to a receiver controlled system, the overlap between information and education become greater - and may even equal unity).

A sixth misconception could be added to the list delineated by Ely. In fact, it is a direct outgrowth of number five. Simply stated: "The means of communicating information, as presently practiced, is adequate." As a source-controlled system, the means and level of sophistication can be a priori established by the source (e.g., researcher, ERIC, universities). But in a receiver-controlled system, the receiver becomes a discriminating consumer who determines for himself those elements that have meaning for what ever purpose and/or based on what ever criteria. Thus it then becomes incumberent on the information source to use a means of communication that will maximize the transition of data to information for the receiver. In other words, in what ever means of communication is used by researchers, the language used should be such that decision-makers and implementors can understand the message that is the result of the research. For school superintendents, school board members, action and community leaders, principal components, canonical vectors, Wilk's lambda ($\lambda$), or eigen values might not have the same meaning (or fascination) to them as they do to researchers. In addition the conclusions, implications, and recommendations (as well as much of the non-technical sections) of a report should be written so that one need not be a semanists and rhetorician to be able to use the data as input in an informational system.

The consumer of educational research is expanding. No longer is the traditional educator (teacher, university professor, administrator) the sole interested party in education, and no longer are they the sole decision makers in education (it is rather fallacious to assume that they were ever the sole deciders). No where can it

best be illustrated than in the urban community. As stated quite succinctly by Watson (1973:78): "A wide spectrum of groups and coalitions of groups is concerned with education: some of them see change as critically important; others reluctantly admit its inevitability; some oppose change of any sort." Former Deputy Commissioner for Development at the U.S. Office of Education, Ron Davis, is the founder of the Institute for Responsive Education at Yale University. The Institute's goal is to study and encourage the process of citizen participation in educational decision-making.

Regardless of the motivation of the interested individuals, they all gather and use information as part of their decision-making process. Research into many areas of education in the urban environment can provide data that could be used in these individuals' informational systems. Consquently, the type and quality of the research is crucial and can play a significant role in decision-making. Conversely, the type and quality of research may <u>not</u> contribute to decision making at all. Although not all research can be expected to have impact on decision-making, it is appalling how many decisions are <u>not based</u> on valid and reliable data and information. Whether it is the fault of the source or the receiver is rather a moot point here, rather research can be used in helping to shape the educational system and environment in the urban community...if only it would focus on urban problems in a realistic manner and use realistic approaches. To this writer, Action Research, by its very nature, does just this.

## Rationale for ACTION RESEARCH

There are many "introduction to education research" texts that can give adequate definitions of the sundry orientations of educational research (Best, 1970; Wiersma, 1969: Borg and Gall, 1971). Generally, the categories of research are: basic or fundamental research, applied research, and action research.[3] Basic research is concerned with theory development and testing and with the understanding of phenomena, while applied research extends basic research into actual problem situations. Those involved in applied research take findings out of the lab (or controlled situation) into the market place for testing and/or further development and refinement. It may also be research that focuses on the solution of a practical problem (e.g., improvement of a product or process in an actual situation). Action research is aimed at the solution of an immediate problem arising as part of the operation of a school or educational project. (Mouly, 1969: 1150). Its focus is on immediate application - not on theory development and/or broad generalizations. Since its emphasis is on a problem in a local setting, it will more than likely have limited "external validity." But so what! Its purpose

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[3] Ausubel (1969:8-11) divided the orientation of research into: basic science research, extrapolated research in the basic sciences, and research at the applied level. Basic research is concerned with the discovery of general laws. Extrapolated basic science research is oriented towards the solution of practical or applied problem. It identifies a problem in the applied field and models an experimental design analogous to those used in basic research (except on a highly simplified level is performed in relation to the actual problem - that is under the conditions found in the actual situation.

is to improve practices (and to provide information) while at the same time, assisting those who try to improve such practices by combining the research function with individual growth in such areas as objectivity, skill in research process, habits of thinking, and working with others (Best, 1970:12-13).

Action research enables teachers, administrators, and community project staffs to participate in the solution of their own problems as they actually experience them through research that supplies significant information. Stephen M. Corey (1953) has stated that teacher attitudes will more likely be changed as a result of research which the teacher actually helped plan, conduct, and evaluate, than as a result of reading a study on the subject reported in a journal. He has also emphasized that any change in teacher behavior must be preceded by a corresponding change in teacher attitude. This writer projects that the nature of action research will more than likely produce changes in behaviors and attitudes of those performing the research, whether they be teachers, administrators, community project staff, or "professional" researchers. Minimally, action research, if performed objectively, will produce a better understanding of a local problem and its environment, as well as the sundry factors influencing, effecting, or generating the problem.

John B. Carroll (1973:21) has taken the stance that applied and basic research play equally vital roles in education. This writer would also include action research as a viable and defensible research task. Kapel (1973) listed eleven assumptions that could form the justification for action research. They are being listed

because they focus on and illustrate the weakness of current research thrusts in urban education:

1. There are many types of legitimate research (e.g., historical, survey, census, polls, case studies, curriculum evaluation, etc.) that can be performed and are indeed needed in urban communities.

2. Not all research need be factorial in design with the usual traditional control groups when looking at effects.

3. Heuristic studies have a place in urban communities.

4. Teachers and community personnel can be active researchers in planning and implementing projects.

5. Inferences to larger populations need not always be made, nor is it always desirable to have this as a goal when developing a research design.

6. There are unique problems facing a particular urban school or program that need immediate attention.

7. Individuals known in the community can be more effective in some research project than strangers.

8. Central researcher bureaus, such as those found in Philadelphia, New York City or Pittsburgh have specific and significant functions, but they neither have the time, staff, nor funds to investigate all the problem areas facing individual schools or groups. This is not to imply that there are no problems common to all the urban schools in a particular school district, nor to programs within a large project. There are, and such bureaus are best equipped with staff and computers to do large scale research in these areas.

9. Unobtrusive approaches like those described by Webb, can be used to give the researcher information dealing with a particular problem.

10. Analyses of data, whether rigorous or just "eye-balling," does give the investigator direction. Not all the assumptions needed for some analyses can be met by the data or the situation. After all, not all classrooms or programs have randomly selected students or participants, nor might the data collected be normally distributed.

11. Immediacy of results might have value under certain conditions. There are times when decisions have to be made under the pressures of time or crises and the luxury of time (needed under traditional research procedures) is not available. (Kapel, 1973: 105)

Although the type of research design is very significant to the researcher, the statistical procedures used, and the findings, there are many trade-offs that must be made in order for the data to become part of the informational system of decision-makers and clients (receivers). The "baby and the bath water" or the "trees and the forrest" syndrome operates here. Research in the real world, particularly urban communities, is not the "dream" of most classical researchers. Yet it is for this reason that researchers must be willing to violate some of the most cherished assumptions to focus on urban problem areas.

Although addressing himself to curriculum evaluation per se, Lewy's (1973) warnings are appropriate to much research that is performed in real settings. He cautions against evaluation (research for our purposes) becoming too rigid, too locked into a standard pattern, scheme, or model, thus loosing the uniqueness of a particular situation and/or forcing reality to fit a particular evaluation model. A warning that striving for perfection (trees and the forrest again) may not necessarily be germane to a project is also given. Increasing validity of measurements may not increase meaningful results - in fact such efforts may take away from other and more significant activities. In many programs, projects, or situations not all elements can be measured, let alone formally evaluated. Research should supply information that can be used in the decision-making process - research itself is not the goal. If it was, then research should be measured in terms of number, scope and weight (number of pages).

## Facilitator of Research and a Training Program

In-service education, increased research conscientiousness and faculty-staff morale, as well as promotion of problem-solving are some of the benefits of action research delineated by Mouly (1969:1130). However, he cautions that in order for those engaged in action research to be successful, they must have access to adequate consulting services for the purposes of: clarifying the problem enough for it to be researched, and developing and implementing the necessary research and statistical design. Good (1966: 260) also recognizes the need to acquire necessary tools and techniques for those involved in action research. He further states "the need for this training presents a real challenge to programs in teacher education." Since urban problems are not exclusively within the domains of schools and education, this writer would extend Good's statement to all programs that train personnel working in the urban environment. Corey (1955) suggested several ways College of Education personnel could stimulate action research. One suggestion is to provide appropriate experience in graduate programs in the procedures of co-operative-action research. This writer submits that no matter how desirable co-operative-action research might be, the need for uniquely trained individuals becomes apparent as non-traditional research is undertaken by a wide variety of personnel in the urban community. This situation will require an individual trained in working closely with people at many levels - some of whom have little interest in or acceptance of research and evaluation. Kapel (1973) has proposed the position of a "Facilitator of Research in Urban Schools and Communities." This person would focus on supporting action research in the urban environment.

In order to meet the demands for such action oriented researchers, institutions of higher learning must develop unique training programs that combine academic training and relevant field experiences. No institution should attempt such a crucial program without a philosophic commitment, a competent staff, and a desire to work and plan jointly with urban community groups.

Research training programs (Facilitator of Research in Urban Schools and Community) on the masters and doctoral level should be developed, similar to the federally funded Trainers of Teacher Trainers Program, (Triple-T Projects), with seven primary foci: 1) to train researchers to do action research at the local school building or community level; 2) to be urban problem solving oriented (as opposed to discrete research); 3) to be involved in research projects that will produce information that can be used in decision-making; 4) to prepare researchers to train local school or community personnel in the planning and execution of research projects; 5) to be consultants to local urban personnel involved in projects; 6) to sensitize educational researchers to the needs of the urban school-community; and 7) to manage research projects and facilities in urban school districts or community projects directly related to education.

Such a research training program should have three major areas of study and demonstrated competencies (refer to Table 1). The first area (A) should focus on urban studies and establish a base for the researcher in the urban environment. The second area (b) should be in fields of statistics, research methodology and design, and educational psychology - this should give the researcher the needed

skills, understandings, and knowledges needed to become a competent educational researcher, per se. The third area (c) should establish a field of study that interests and concerns the researcher -- in essence, this becomes his "academic discipline."

In order to be effective, the primary base of operation should be the local school building or community project, the community feeding the school or project, or the classroom or comparable subdivision of the project. To establish such a working base in the field, the internship would be designed to allow for maximum exposure to the urban environment while developing appropriate competencies (refer to Figure 1). During the first year, the trainee would work and study in a central research office or parent project (e.g., executive office of a Model Cities Program) to become acquainted with the total educational research needs of the urban school district or targeted urban population. He would also learn about the capabilities, problems, and limitations facing such centralized operations. In the next two years, this trainee would be assigned to a school or project, or a consortium of schools or programs (depending on school or program size), with primary research responsibilities to individual schools or programs, principals or directors, and teachers or community personnel. It is here, in the field, that the skills and understandings demanded by the seven major foci would be fully developed. Individuals educated and trained under this program would then be able to widen the research base that now exists in the urban community. Teachers, local school personnel or community people would become active participants in the development, design, and execution of action research in their con-

cerned areas. True, these projects, more than likely, would be rather restrictive; but one could realize immediate benefits in the classroom, in the local school environment, or in the local urban community.

The general parameters of the program are 1) the program is urban field based; 2) the program encompasses an internship in a central research office or central office of a community project, as well as an internship in a local urban school or a group of schools, or in a local project or a group of projects; 3) the internships are supplemented by courses in related (or needed) fields offered at the university and/or integrated into the internship experience by the university and the host organization; 4) Supervision and evaluation of the trainee comes from the host organization, the university, and the community population served by the host organization; 5) Since the program is competency based, trainees may waive courses upon demonstration of skills and/or based on past experiences; 6) It is not a program to train educational psychology researchers, per se, but rather to focus on problem solving and information generation for decision making in urban schools and communities; 7) the focus is also on broadening the base of, and participation in, all types of research; and hopefully 8) it is an attempt to get systematic research to focus on problems beyond both the four walls of the university and the individual desires of research professors and/or their graduate students.

TABLE I

FACILITATOR OF RESEARCH IN URBAN SCHOOLS - COMMUNITIES

(GENERAL COMPETENCY AREAS)

| Urban Studies Area A | Statistics, Methodology, Psychology Area B | Elective Area of Concentration Area C |
|---|---|---|
| Urban Minorities | Educational Statistics (through advanced multivariate) | This would form the "academic" base for the facilitator |
| Urban Social Systems and Sociology | Research Design | (e.g.: reading; language arts; mathematics education; mathematics; sociology, economics, urban planning, etc.) |
| History of Urban Communities | Research Methodology | |
| Urban School Districts and School Curricula | Research Management | |
| Urban Geography and Ecology | Developmental Psychology | |
| Consultant Techniques | Learning Theories | |
| Community Relations | | |
| Internship in Urban Education Research | | |

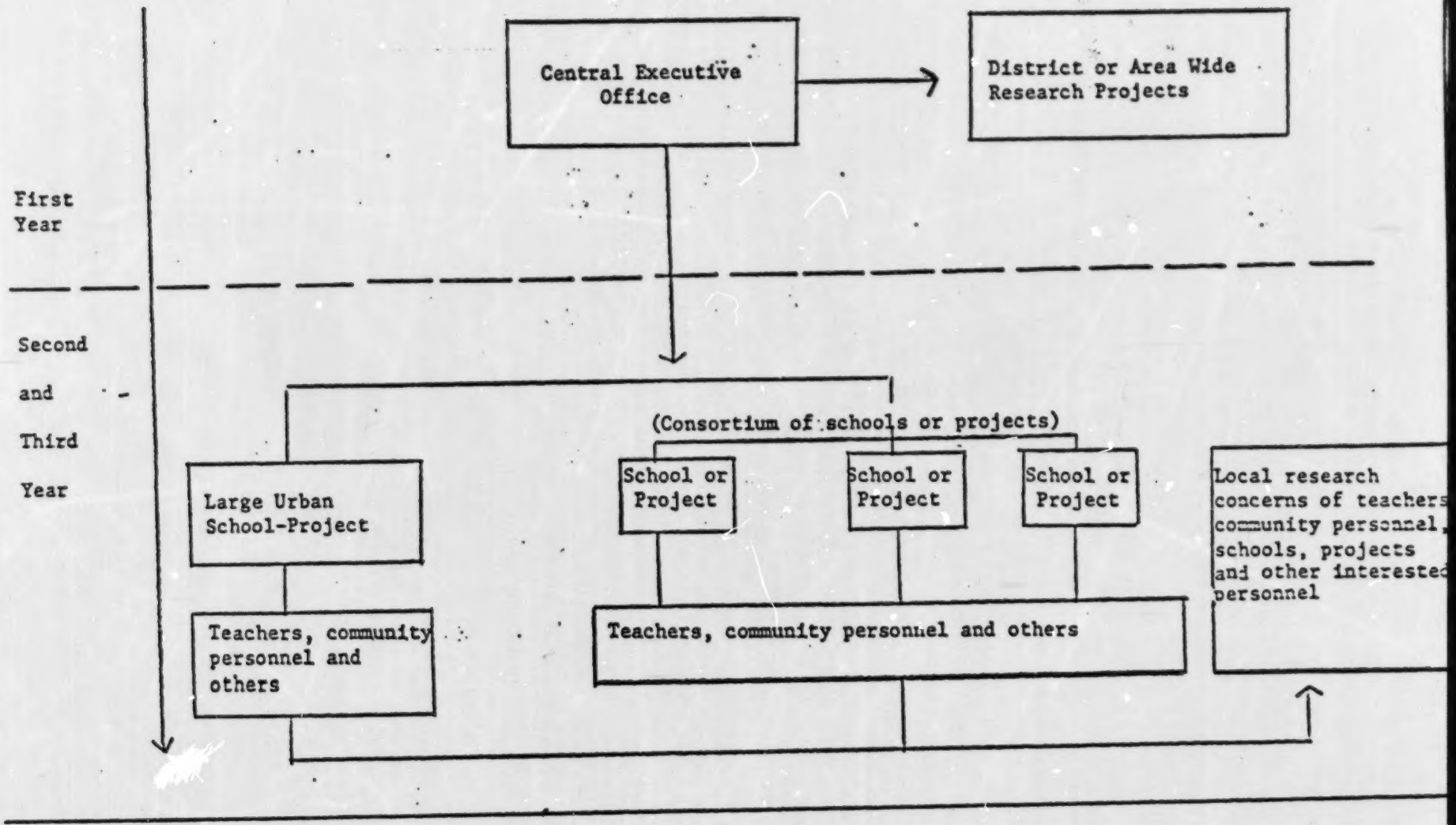
Central Executive Office
District or Area Wide Research Projects
First Year
Second and Third Year
(Consortium of schools or projects)
Large Urban School-Project
School or Project
School or Project
School or Project
Local research concerns of teachers, community personnel, schools, projects and other interested personnel
Teachers, community personnel and others
Teachers, community personnel and others

FIGURE 1 PARADIGM OF THE INTERNSHIP OF THE PROPOSED FACILITATOR OF RESEARCH IN URBAN SCHOOLS - COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

## Summary

Research and researchers must be willing to break away from traditional approaches when dealing with the real world of the urban community. But first we must find ways that will bring research out of the rarefied atmosphere of the university and reduce the distrust and non-understanding it has produced in the urban community.

It has been proposed that research focus on urban problem solving and information generation for decision-making, and that action research be encouraged to re-focus present research thrusts. In order to accomplish a wider range of research and increase the number performing research it has been proposed that formal programs (Facilitator of Research in Urban Schools and Communities) at universities be developed to train individuals who would (1) be trained to do relevant research at the local level; (2) be urban problem solving and information oriented; (3) train local school or community personnel in the planning and execution of research projects; (4) be a consultant to local urban personnel involved in projects; (5) be a researcher sensitive to the needs of the urban school and community; and (6) to manage research projects in the urban community.

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